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Work-Family Conflict among Working Parents of Children with Autism in Malaysia

Shirley Angie Sitimin^{a*}, Amily Fikry^b, Zulhabri Ismail^c, Norashikin Hussein^b

^aPhD Postgraduate Student, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

^bSenior Lecturer, Faculty of Business and Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

^cSenior Lecturer, Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Surveying, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malaysia

Abstract

This qualitative study describes the conflict between work roles and family roles, and recommendations to reduce the work-family conflict from the perspective of working parents of children with Autism in Malaysia. Data were collected personally from 12 respondents via a semi-structured interview. These working parents discussed the work-family conflict that they faced and what kind of needs that can help to overcome the conflicts, as well as if there is any support provided by their employer to reduce work-family conflict. Interview results indicate that balancing work roles and family roles at once is very challenging. It shows that these working parents need a nursery that accepts a child with Autism and support from their employer to lessen their work-family conflict.

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1. Introduction

Being in a full-time job and parents to children with Autism at once is a challenging role. This is because working parents spend almost half their day at work and only back to their family lives at the end of the day. Managing and

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +06-012-777-3844;
E-mail address: angiesitimin@gmail.com

switching their priorities and roles from work roles to family roles and to the other way around, which is close to impossible to do. Not being able to give equal time for all the domains might lead to some dissatisfaction and guilt about the roles they play.

The known characteristics of children with Autism, which are hyperactive, behaviours of self-injury, disparities of mood and in eating, and also compulsions and obsessions, which is hard for the parents to communicate with the child^{1,2}. Some of the challenging aspects of living with these children are excessive caring burdens, less quality time with family members, handling problems of siblings, education and future concerns, and also financial difficulties^{3,4}. Parents of children with Autism should know the child's compulsion of enduring interventions, as additional responsibilities for them. Some of the interventions are an intensive teaching which is done both outside and inside the home of the child. It consists of guidelines, assessing and appraising by parents⁵. Unfortunately, these interventions may not suit to all the children with Autism and their family as well⁶. As a result, it takes time for the parents to search for appropriate interventions or programs that suitable for them and their children.

Many studies proposed that work-family conflict contributes toward work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction⁷, organizational commitment⁸, intention to quit⁹, burnout¹⁰, absenteeism¹¹, work-related strain¹², personal/family such as marital satisfaction¹³, family satisfaction¹⁴, and family-related strain¹⁵ and other related outcomes, such as psychological strain¹⁶, physical complaints¹⁷, depression¹⁸, and mistreatment¹⁹. Hence, the present study's objective is to understand the needs that these working parents of children with Autism want to reduce work-family conflicts.

2. Review of literature

2.1. Work-family conflict

Work-family conflict is defined as work roles impede with family roles and the other way around^{20,21}. Those engaged in numerous roles that involving family and work, they might experience role strain, physical illnesses, and decreased satisfaction²². Work-family conflict is severe among working women with young children, especially infants with poor health conditions as mentioned by past studies²³.

Continually encountered with work-family conflict, the employee may expose to exhaustion of emotion where it is a factor which will inspire him or her to turnover intention and affect job performance²⁴. Bad experience from work-to-family conflict is related to employee lacks of ability in dealing with both roles and low satisfaction towards work-family stability²⁵. Multiple roles with limited available resources, such as time and energy, can make working parents of children with Autism struggle to balance these roles.

Managing two roles at once such as family and work roles are an ordinary scenario for every employee^{26,27}. Even though being involved in both roles are very impressive as an individuals²⁸, however, once the person is incapable of balancing these roles, conflict of roles may increases^{20,21,30,31}. Thus, work-family conflict can be reduced when employer opts by providing family-friendly policies to lessen the roles conflict so that employees can balance their family and work demands³². Also, looking at the technological advancement viewpoint, the use of humanoid robotic caregivers or nursing robot may help the parents of children with Autism as well in lessening their conflict between family roles and work roles^{33,34}. Apart from that, they should stay employed so that they can avoid any financial obligations³⁵.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and assessment tool

The sample for the qualitative analysis consists of 12 working parents from various private sector companies in Malaysia. The inclusion criteria for the sample are only parents working in the private sector as a full time employee, either a working mother or father was chosen and they must at least have one child with Autism. The researcher developed a semi-structured interview to gather data from the respondents. The respondents were

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